

Children in care

This section has been written to support you with considering the needs of a child in care during times of transition. It should be noted that good practice principals from other Mind the Gap materials are equally relevant and should be read in conjunction with this leaflet.

Transition can be a stressful time for children and can have a far reaching impact on their emotional wellbeing and academic achievements. Transition is a big responsibility for practitioners, families and carers and should be made a priority.

Inside you'll find practical ideas and suggestions to help children move from one stage of their learning to the next.

Top Tips

- Successful transition takes time. Plan extra opportunities for children to meet their new teacher and other staff members working in the room
- Make sure the child is able to build a secure attachment to one person who will greet them every morning
- Ensure there is a second person that the child responds well to in case of staff absence from the room.
- Ensure a transition Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting takes place prior to the child starting school if possible between the preschool and class teacher, parent/ carer and social worker
- As the receiving practitioner use the transition progress summary to support transition arrangements for the child
- Visit children in their familiar environment, observe and get to know them
- Communicate with key persons to gather relevant information including any Special Educational Needs, cultural and linguistic requirements
- Make time to share experiences during the transition period
- Create a photo book and talk to children about the changes that will be happening
- Use settling in-bags to support the child
- Write a settling in plan and review how successful the strategies have been with previous staff parent/carers/ social workers
- Make time for observations and conversations – don't make assumptions!
- Set up a comfortable environment full of familiar resources, keeping it the same as when the child last saw it. Consider providing a safe place for the child to go if they are finding things hard in their new environment and need time to settle.
- Take friendship groups into account as these will help the child to settle
- Answer key questions the child may have through a welcome book

Attachment

Our earliest experience of relationships with others acts as a blueprint for what we expect of other people.

The responses we get from these carers determines whether we expect that others can be trusted, reliable, will meet our needs, will soothe us when we are distressed, will stimulate us when we are bored. These blueprints are developed at a time before language and hence are very resistant to change.

Even when children are in new relationships they will continue to expect the same response in others. They may misinterpret other people's behaviour to fit in with their view of the world. Transitions are a particularly challenging time for children with attachment difficulties as they will need to develop new relationships. They may have built up trust with one or two (or more) key adults in their early years' setting, but they are now being asked to 'move on' from these, now trusted, relationships to new ones.

Skills to help with transitions:

Identify a key adult and give extra time and careful planning to introduce the new adult and help develop trust.

The key adult will need to:

- prioritise the relationship
- maintain their own capacity to think (have support)
- recognise that it will be challenging, but positive relationships are regularly repaired
- learn to listen, observe and notice
- recognise that behaviour is communication

Ensuring a child has a place to start school

Children in Care have priority whenever a school place is applied for. A child in care will be allocated a place in the school deemed to offer the best education for the child.

As for all children, it should be the person with Parental Responsibility who submits the application to school admissions. In cases where a child is voluntarily accommodated (Section 20), this would usually mean the birth parent, but in practice it is often the social worker who gets permission from the birth parent to apply on their behalf.

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

If a child already is attending a setting or child minder then they are already likely to have an Early Years PEP with educational targets written for the child to support their outcomes. During the summer term the setting or child minder, class teacher, parent/ carer, social worker and senior improvement advisor will be invited to attend a PEP meeting to support new educational targets and any transitional arrangements needed as the child transfers into school. The meeting will be chaired by the senior improvement advisor.

Transition progress summary

The key person will complete this prior to the child leaving the setting, with reference to the child's characteristics of effective learning and where the child is achieving in terms of development matter age bands. But more importantly the key person will have written a paragraph offering advice for the receiving setting about the child to support transition such as preferred way of being comforted, a transitional object; family or people who are special to them; special friends; health and well-being information; cultural information; favourite things to talk about. It is vital that this is as accurate as possible and shared between practitioners to support transitional arrangements.

Visits to the setting

If possible the class teacher or other staff members working in the room should have opportunity to visit the child in their setting to make observations and get to know them in their more familiar environment. In this way they will get to observe their interactions with friendship groups, other adults and their preferred learning styles and begin to plan for these when the child starts school.

Visits to school

The pre-school setting or child minder should try to visit the school with the child that they will be attending so that it starts to become a familiar place. By making a photo book for the child to take home and look at over the holiday, of the school and the new people the child will meet may help them to feel more confident to start school.

Also if they have had a positive experience a photo keepsake for the child may be useful for the child to have and reference, but check with the social worker if photos are permitted.

Try to arrange visits to school where the child can join in with all the activities and the usual members of staff will be there. It becomes confusing for very young children if supply teachers are covering the class that day!

Settling in plan

During the PEP meeting, it may become apparent that a settling in plan may be necessary to support the child with starting school.

This should be written in conjunction with the parent/ carer and reviewed early on to see if the strategies are working, and if not amended.

Meet and Greet

Make sure the child is able to build a secure attachment to one person who will greet them every morning with a friendly smile and routine.

Ensure there is a second person that the child responds well to in case of staff absence from the room. If a staff absences are known then prepare the child for change.